

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 714

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

December 14, 1942

## WILLIAM HARRISON LAMBERT, 1842-1912

The Lincoln Foundation Advisory Group chose the name of only one collector of diversified Lincolniana to appear on its Recognition Roster. The selection for this honor was William Harrison Lambert, who might truly be called "The Dean of Lincoln Hobbyists."

Major Lambert, as he was best known, was a veteran of the Civil War, having seen service at Antietam and with Sherman on his march to the sea. The Major was one of the veterans who passed before Abraham Lincoln in the Grand Review at the close of the war. On March 13, 1865, he was breveted Major "for gallant and meritorious conduct during the war," and later was awarded a medal of honor under a resolution of Congress.

Major Lambert was an influential member of the Grand Army of the Republic and was elected to the commandery of the Loyal Legion of the state of Pennsylvania. He became commander on May 3, 1911. He was also interested in the civic organizations of Philadelphia, where he resided, and served as one of the trustees of the city library. He was an officer of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In 1866, a year after his honorable discharge from the army, he became affiliated with the Mutual Life Insurance Company and continued with this institution until his decease in 1912. He became one of the managers of the company in 1872 and served as a member of the board of trustees for many years.

Very few of Major Lambert's addresses and writings were put in print. The earliest pamphlet which appears under his name is entitled, "Abraham Lincoln, Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States." This address was delivered before the Society of the Army of the Potomac, in Pittsburgh on October 11, 1899. Most of the other writings of Major Lambert appeared in 1909, the centennial year of Lincoln's birth, and included these titles: "Versions of the Gettysburg Address," "A Lincoln Correspondence," "Lincoln Literature," "Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address, When Written, How Received, Its True Form," "The Faith of Abraham Lincoln," published by Sunday School Times Company in 1811, was one of his last contributions. Chosen from one of these discussions is a brief comment by Horace White which greatly appealed to Major Lambert as a collector of Lincolniana.

"I cannot find in any country a special department of literature collection around the name of any statesman of the nineteenth century like that which celebrates the name of our Martyr President. This mass of literature is produced and collected and cherished because the hearts of men and women go out to Lincoln. It is not mere admiration for his mental and moral qualities, but a silent response to the magnetic influence of his humanity, his unselfish and world-embracing charity. And thus though dead he yet speaketh to men, women, and children who never saw him, and so, I think, he will continue to speak to generations yet unborn."

It is as a collector that Major Lambert will be longest remembered. While his valuable library of Thackeray books was an important one, it was the collection of Lincolniana that became his outstanding contribution to American bibliography.

The first Lincoln item he acquired was a copy of Holland's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, presented to him by his father. It was his acquisition of the Andrew Boyd Lincoln Library which formed the nucleus for his larger effort.

His only real competitor in the Lincoln hobby field, Judd Stewart, made this statement about the Lambert library: "His collection of Lincoln books and pamphlets

surpasses any other collection, not only in its completeness, but in the number of rare items. In autographed letters Major Lambert's collection is without rival."

Starting his hobby not long after the close of the Civil War, the Major became the best authority of his day on practically all phases of Lincolniana. He was a collector of books about Lincoln, of books Lincoln read, original Lincoln letters, and pictures of Lincoln, in both original photographs and rare prints. Even pieces of office furniture associated with Lincoln in Springfield were acquired by the Major to create atmosphere for his Lincoln rarities.

We expect if Major Lambert could tell the story of his experiences in collecting Lincolniana he would mention two different periods of effort, designated as before and after a fire, which destroyed some of his valuable items. In 1806 he issued a printed want list with this explanatory note appearing at the top of the four page leaflet: "Wishing to restore and to complete, so far as possible, his collection of Lincoln Literature, which was greatly damaged by fire, June 5, 1906/William H. Lambert/Address: Mutual Life Building, Philadelphia/Asks Reports Upon the Following/Books and Pamphlets/Relating in Whole or Part to/Abraham Lincoln." Then follows a list of items in this interesting want list. This four page printed list itself has become a rare Lincoln item and is not mentioned in any of the Lincoln bibliographies. Another of these Lambert want lists appeared in 1907.

Possibly the first Lincoln group organized, which met periodically throughout the year, was known as the Lincoln Fellowship. Major Lambert was elected, as its president. Judge Daniel Fish, Charles W. McCellan, Joseph B. Oakleaf and Judd Stewart, four other Lincoln collectors who served as vice-presidents, comprised, with Major Lambert, what was known by those outside the inner circle as the "Big Five."

It has been customary for collectors who have built up great libraries to have in mind, even while collecting, certain institutions where their books would eventually find a permanent home. A notable example of this is the collection of the late Governor Horner, now the property of the Illinois State Historical Library. Other fine libraries now in the making are already earmarked for educational centers when the donors pass from the scene. However, the collection of Major Lambert was the only one of the five large libraries of Lincolniana that was distributed by public auction. This was done at the request of the Major himself who wanted to give all Lincoln collectors an opportunity to share in his treasures. No auction sale of Lincoln items has equaled, in interest, the Lambert sale and there are very few of the larger libraries that did not acquire some of the items made available at that time.

One of the few books which the Lambert family purchased at the auction was the Holland volume presented to the Major by his father. It would be impossible to attempt to list in a single copy of *Lincoln Lore* even a limited number of the valuable items sold at the Lambert sale. Priced catalogues reveal something of the wealth of this remarkable collection.

However, even Major Lambert, if he were to return today, would not only marvel at the magnitude of many of the modern collections of Lincolniana, but he would be surprised, indeed, to learn of the great number of Lincoln items contemporary with his day, which have come to light, but unknown to the "Big Five." Wherever the Lincoln hobby is ridden to any extent the name of Major Lambert will be revered.

Note: This is the fifth of a series of biographical sketches on the ten persons selected by the Foundation Advisory Group for enrollment on the Lincoln Recognition Roster.